

A Dine (Navajo) Perspective on Self-Determination: An Exposition of an Egalitarian Place

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On a sunny July morning, in 2000, high in the plateau country of the Ramah Navajo with pinon trees surrounding us, I sat next to an old man, who had just finished checking the rusty barbed wire and aging wooden fence posts of his small cornfield. Even in his eighties the old man, hammer and nails in hand, still seemed very capable. A cool brisk breeze blew now and then and kept us cool from the hot sun. We sat on the ground for hours while he related, in the Navajo language, stories about his childhood, Hweeldi, and life in his community. With his gnarled finger, he pointed toward the east at Tsoodzil, the sacred mountain, and stated his gratitude for living in the shadow of this mountain. The old man finished his stories by stating "Bilagaana, doo ts'i'it'eeda" [White people are treacherous, unpredictable, and powerful.] He warned that even today we, Dine (Navajo), need to be careful in working with them. With that shared wisdom, being careful of what is presented, I began my story of the Ramah Navajo People, Tl'oh chini Dine'e.

All for the benefit of Western science research continues in indigenous communities. The Dine (Navajo) believe (and rightly so) that they do *not* have the privileged decision whether or not to be "put under the microscope." They, however, do have the power to decide what can and should be divulged. Responsibility in research of indigenous scholars to their own cultures and simultaneously toward Western academia becomes a schizophrenic undertaking in order to be published. The work of indigenous scholars is problematic but necessary because "Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous people is about countering the dominant society's image of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems" (Smith, L., 1999, p. 151). Correcting the misrepresentations about indigenous people is a monumental task.

Scholars have been reexamining theoretical constructs of research conducted in indigenous communities (Canella & Manuelito, 2006, in press; Grande, 2005; Mutua & Swadener, 2003; Smith, 1999). In the past, theory and its development based on perspectives from the Western worldview were assumed to be definitive. However, indigenous scholars, often as insiders doing research in their own

communities, have informed and continue to inform academia about the incongruent applications of Western theory to life in indigenous communities as well as the unethical representations of indigenous communities. Non-Native researchers who have worked among the Dine (Navajo) “sometimes comment on a certain ‘fuzzy’ quality about the [Dine (Navajo)] culture” (Aberle, 1963 cited in Witherspoon, 1975, p.x). Comments such as the previous one continue to be made and reflect the biased perspectives of non-native researchers. Methodology in theory development is thus an important aspect of research that requires reexamination when research is conducted in indigenous communities such as the Dine (Navajo) community.

To understand the Dine (Navajo) people and their experiences, research methods must first and foremost address the Navajo worldview. The importance of identifying worldview in indigenous research begins with the basic question: What is the point of reference for the interpretation of data? Duran and Duran state that even when academicians pretend to study cultures different from their own, most dare not ask this question (1995, p. 25). Worldview of any culture and society is explicated through epistemological principles which frame the way one sees the world. Dine (Navajo) worldview is explicated through epistemology that has been rejected and debased by the dominant society since contact centuries ago. However, enduring powerful Dine (Navajo) worldview persists in contemporary Dine (Navajo) society and continues to frame the world for its people and children who daily are conflicted by the demands of American schooling and the Euro-western worldview. One area in which Dine (Navajo) world view has been ignored is in the construction of the concept of “self-determination.”

For a democratic society to “walk its talk,” the American society and its foundation, situated in academic research, must recognize Dine (Navajo) perspectives on self-determination, a concept that is paradoxical to Euro-western usage and understanding. Like indigenous people worldwide, American Indians desire to be self-determined and be rid of the shackles of colonialism. In the United States indigenous education has been greatly impacted by federal policies in what has been referred to as the “self-determination era.” Self-determination related policies have been perceived as a panacea for inequities. Duran and Duran caution:

Native activism resulting in the 1975 Native American Self-Determination Act has ushered in a new era of native scholarship and tribal control on research and in program planning. This newly legitimized push for self-determination, unfortunately, does not immediately rectify problems rooted in years of white-biased research and social engineering. (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 24)

Grave misunderstandings between mainstream society and indigenous people have been caused by the imposition of “self-determination” as defined by the Western world upon non-Western indigenous societies. Centuries of imperialistic treatment by the United States government has also rendered American Indian people dependent upon directives that have been baffling and destructive to their lives.

In his reflection on *self-determination* and its expression and implementation in education, Deloria justifiably maintains that in the past three decades indigenous people have not clearly defined what we mean by *self-determination*. “As a result, many types of Indian controlled schools have been established under the umbrella of self-determination. . . But we must ask ourselves, what is self-determination? What is it that we as selves and communities are determining?” (Deloria, 1994, p.56). Four decades later after the passage of the self-determination legislation, Native lawyers, educators, and Native communities still have not clarified the indigenous perspective of self-determination but instead have accepted the Euro-western definition of self-determination without question.

The 1975 Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act has been credited for the emergence of American Indian community-controlled schools throughout the country. In 1999 Tippeconnic reported that there were approximately 114 American Indian community-controlled schools in the United States (Tippeconnic III, 1999). Today, very little still is known about these schools with the exception of a few Arizona schools that had mainstream scholars widely publish their accomplishments. There are arguably valid reasons for the dearth of information about the many community-controlled schools. In most American Indian community controlled schools, administrators and teachers have been overwhelmed with daily operational activities that little time is left for publishing their stories. But by far the most significant reason comes from the value system of indigenous communities where tooting one’s horn is not acceptable. The time has come, however, for indigenous people to tell their own stories about self-determination from their own perspectives. This paper focuses on the Ramah Navajo people’s views of *self-determination*.

Contextual Background

The Ramah Navajo Community has been overly researched and has been deemed “the most studied people in the world” (Blanchard, 1971, p.3). Previous history or published commentary about the community has been written from a non-Ramah Navajo perspective. In this section the voices of the Ramah Navajo are presented in their telling of two major issues in their community, land and education/schooling.

The Ramah Navajo Reservation is one of three satellite communities of the Dine (Navajo) Nation. As a satellite community of approximately 3000, it is located 75 miles south of the main reservation. The present land base of 146,953 acres is only a fraction of what use to be Ramah Navajo land. An elder in his eighties emphasized that the Ramah Navajo use to herd their sheep, hunt, and farm in the Ramah Navajo reservation and even further south toward Apache Creek, west toward Fence Lake, and 75 miles east all the way to the Dine (Navajo) sacred mountain, Tsoodzil, Mount Taylor. The present reservation for the Ramah Navajo people, which is surrounded by non-Navajo residents, has been considerably reduced in size.

The Navajo name for the Ramah Community is *Tl’ohchini* (translated literally to

onions), designating the place where wild onions grow. The Ramah Navajo refer to themselves as *Tl'ohchini Dine'e*. The seat of government, the Ramah Navajo Chapter, is located at Mountain View. The Ramah Navajo Chapter is a member of the Navajo Tribal Council with a representative council delegate, who is elected by the Ramah Navajo Community. The Ramah Navajo Chapter House is the site of tribal, county, and government elections. The Ramah Navajo Chapter is the only chapter of the Navajo Nation with its own Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agency.

From 1864-1868, the Ramah Navajos along with other Dine (Navajo) were sent on a death march to Fort Sumner and were incarcerated there, approximately 300 miles from their homeland. Approximately 9000 Dine (Navajo) went on this march or long walk and only 2000 returned (Iverson, 2002). This event is known as Hweeldi (The Long Walk), a time of great suffering. Approximately 70 years ago Bidaga, son of Many Beads who was the leader of the Ramah Navajo before and during Hweeldi provided important information surrounding Hweeldi (The Long Walk) and the Ramah Navajo people's claim to their land.

I was born in Ramah before the Navajo went to Fort Sumner [1864]. The grandparents and great grandparents of the Navajos who live in Ramah now lived there long before going to Fort Sumner. The Navajos have lived in Ramah for six generations. My parents told me about the trip to Fort Sumner for I was a little baby. My parents and the ancestors of the Ramah people were young folks when they came back from Ft. Sumner. They returned to the very place they left, the valley of Ramah. Because our parents and our grandparents were raised and died there, we feel about this land as though it were our mother and father. It is the only place for us to live. The place where my family and the other Navajo lived was near the head of the present Ramah Lake. There are still the remains of our old hogans around the lake. (Ramah Files, 9/2/43, statement to McCarron Committee, cited in Blanchard, 1971, pp. 10-11)

Unlike other Dine (Navajo) who returned to the main Navajo Reservation to rebuild their homes and lives after Hweeldi (The Long Walk), the Ramah Navajo returned to their ancestral lands to discover that white settlers had encroached upon their land which had water, excellent grazing land, and farmland. From that time to the present, tension has simmered between the white settlers over land usage and ownership to the extent that some Ramah Navajo people moved to the main Navajo Reservation for security (Navajo Historical Series, 1954). Others were left to rebuild their lives on the malpais, volcanic land east of their original homeland. Their displacement was the most deplorable event to influence the Ramah Navajos. Adding to this painful reminder throughout the years were the Ramah Navajo people's ignored pleas for assistance in obtaining land for their growing population to agencies including the Dine (Navajo) Tribal government. Finally in 1951, Navajo Tribal Chairman Paul Jones and the Dine (Navajo) government bought additional land for the Ramah Navajo people.

Another major disappointment that the Ramah Navajo encountered was not having a school in their community for their children. Over a hundred years after the

1868 Navajo Treaty which included provisions for a teacher for every 30 Dine (Navajo) children (Acrey, 1979), they still had no school. Ramah Navajo parents decided that they would no longer send their children to boarding schools hundreds of miles away. Many of their children suffered abuses and separation like other American Indian children (Child, 1995; Lomawaima, 1994). Ramah Navajo mothers, especially, caused a stir for many years and wanted their children to attend school at home and not in boarding schools far away. Sam Martinez, a founding school board member, maintained that if the mothers had not been quite so proactive in their efforts to bring formal education into the Ramah Navajo Community, they would have fared differently. In 1970 their long sought after school became a reality only after four non-formally educated elders and a recent high school graduate traveled to Washington D.C. to request funding for a school. In a dramatic display of bravery and desperation, a frail elder, Bertha Lorenzo, threw her blanket down in the doorway of the BIA building and stated she wouldn't leave until funding was granted (McKinley, 1970). On April 20, 1970, funding for the Ramah Navajo community-controlled school was granted.

The school began in brown surplus army tents and a previously condemned school that the Ramah Navajo people renovated. Unlike the establishment of other Indian community controlled schools during this era, the Dine (Navajo) Nation as well as other agencies did not provide the Ramah Navajo people with large sums of funding or even a brand new school facility like the Rough Rock Demonstration School. All efforts to build and maintain the school were "grassroots efforts." A Ramah Navajo described the following activities:

Tents were put up for all students. They used to sleep in the tents along with live-in attendants. We women, several of us were chosen to help. Others helped us cook and care for the children. They stayed up day and night to care for the children until the building was restored. (Baldwin, 1996)

Another Ramah Navajo recalled the following:

It was so exciting because parents came to help with some of the work. Children were doing some of the repair work themselves. Everything was moving progressively and positively which made, I think, the non-Indian people very envious of what was going on. They made up all sorts of negative reports about the activity.

Hostilities and resentment increased between the Ramah Navajo Community and the White Mormon community of Ramah. The Mormon community sent reports to the Albuquerque Bureau of Indian Affairs agency stating: "These people don't know what they're doing." The White Mormon Ramah residents even sent letters to Washington as stated by a Ramah Navajo School Board member: "Don't let them [Ramah Navajo] have their way. Don't give them any monies. When we got to Washington, they just gave those letters back to us. This way we found out what they [white Mormons] were doing to us" (Baldwin, 1996).

A non-Native researcher reported: "They [anglo Mormons] were unhappy about not being given a role in school affairs" (Blanchard, 1971, p. 41). The Ramah

Navajo people experienced blatant harassment. “They attacked us in many ways. Such as destroying by night the daily work done to restore the building” (Baldwin, 1996). The Ramah Navajo people’s firm resolve and self-determination allowed them to cope with the increasing tension surrounding them during the summer of 1970 while they established their school.

In addition to harassment from the non-Indian Ramah community, challenges for the new school included hiring personnel, acquiring teaching materials, and setting the curriculum all in a span of less than three months. The first major crisis occurred during the first year when the New Mexico School Superintendent Leonard Delayo threatened to close the school because the school’s plan of operation was disapproved. Szaz explains the Ramah Navajo school board’s stance, “They wanted to gear their curriculum to include Navajo culture and history” (1974, p. 174). Senator Joseph Montoya from New Mexico assisted the new school by obtaining conditional approval to proceed after court hearings and tremendous stress for the Ramah Navajo Community. From that humble beginning to the present, the Ramah Navajos have demonstrated self-determination.

Today the Ramah Navajo School, renamed Pine Hill School, has been relocated 30 miles from the original site in the heart of the Ramah Navajo community. In 1973 Mr. Billy Coho, a Ramah Navajo, generously provided his land for the new school. One of his daughters shared interesting information about the school grounds:

We had a house, a log cabin house, and that is where the high school is. Then we had another hogan, and I believe that’s where the mid-school is. Then we had a sheep corral and a horse corral, and I think that’s where the swimming pool is. My brother used to live over here at the staff housing. That’s where he had his two hogans.

Never before had a totally new community just spring up right among the pines, where a Dine (Navajo) family once lived and grazed their sheep and goats.

Today, the multi-million dollar campus consists of grades K-12 as well as post secondary education. Along with school buildings, a gymnasium, swimming pool, football field, homes for school staff, the campus also includes the first Native American FM radio station that was established in 1972. The school also has the first contracted health care clinic, dental, and social services. The school has provided jobs and influenced the infrastructure of the Ramah Navajo community. For the first time paved roads, water, and electricity were brought into the community. Despite serious challenges that Indian community-controlled schools encounter (McCarty, 2002) and racism from surrounding non-Native communities, the Ramah Navajo community continues to be self-determined on their own terms. Their accomplishments have benefited not only the local community but all indigenous communities in the United States.

The most notable historical contributions are the lawsuits filed and won by the Ramah Navajo community. The 1982 *Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. v. Bureau of Revenue*, the 1996 *Ramah Navajo School Board v. Babbitt*, and the 1999 *Ramah*

Navajo Chapter v. Lujan are lawsuits that have benefited not only the Ramah Navajo community but all indigenous people in the United States. For example, the 1982 lawsuit was the first reported case under the Self-Determination Act, and it established that Indian tribes and organizations are protected from state intrusions (Kickingbird and Charleston, 1990). In all three court cases, the Ramah Navajos played a leadership role in defending indigenous self-determination efforts in the United States.

Purpose

In 2001 I conducted a study in the Ramah Navajo community to examine the concept of self determination as it is defined and practiced by a Dine (Navajo) community, which asserted control of its school in 1970. I selected the research site because the Ramah Navajo High School was the first community controlled high school after the inception of Rough Rock Demonstration School, a Dine (Navajo) community controlled elementary school. The study examined two questions: What is self-determination and how is self determination enacted in the Pine Hill School and in the Ramah Navajo Community? In this study, qualitative methodology followed the inductive naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Methodology

I utilized ethnographic techniques: participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. Data collection and analysis proceeded simultaneously. The study design was grounded in the data (Charmaz, 1983, Glazer & Strauss, 1967) and constructed around a Dine (Navajo) context but with a view of other naturalistic methods.

I have been uncomfortable about the methodological structure of the study due to the authoritative and linear process of Western research for knowledge gathering which was imposed upon a non-Western Dine (Navajo) culture. I found it incongruous and inappropriate for me to be obtaining information utilizing "ethnographic techniques." I felt even more marginalized when I compared my own Dine (Navajo) culture to white American mainstream society, all the while coming from the stance of the Western academic paradigm as if I was non-indigenous. In order to be published in academia and to correct an image of the Ramah Navajo people, I had no recourse but to submit to Western research methodology.

Historical Research

At the onset of this study, I did not envision that the research design would incorporate a history of the Ramah Navajo Community. As I started interviewing participants, the two research questions were consistently answered from a historical perspective. In order to comprehend, translate, and interpret the experiences of the Ramah Navajo Community, I included historical research.

I relied heavily upon oral histories from the perspective of the Ramah Navajo as they understood and experienced *self-determination*. I included the Ramah Navajo voice because their history written by outsiders from a Euro-western perspective has been mainly distortions. One explanation that Spicer emphasizes is “again and again, what purports to be record of the native viewpoint is actually what the European writers thought the natives were thinking” (Spicer, 1962, p. 21). Obtaining the Ramah Navajo voice was important for the healing of injustices in misrepresentation of past literature and particularly “to restore a spirit...” (Smith, 1999, p. 28).

Dine (Navajo) World View and Naturalistic Paradigm

As a Dine (Navajo) researcher, I found that the naturalistic paradigm and the Navajo world view have similar fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world. The table below provides a comparison of the Dine (Navajo) world view and the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Assumptions About the Nature of the World		
Assumptions about	Navajo World View	Naturalistic Paradigm
Reality	Multiple realities including dimensions beyond the 5 senses Is holistic	Multiple realities Is holistic Is socially constructed
Knowledge	Is personal Centered on personality development Is a life long journey Is sacred	Is personal Is subjective
Values	Based on the K'é (respect) System Respect towards others and the universe All things in the universe are dependent on one another Nature and life are one Stance toward others is based on relatedness	Is value relative Stance toward others is based on empathy

Native Researcher

The role of researcher in a qualitative study is crucial to the study. “The roles the researcher assumes within the culture and the researcher’s identity and experience are critical to the scientific merit of the study. They are part of the research design...” (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1955 cited in LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 92). Wolcott describes the researcher as the “main instrument of research” (Wolcott, 1975, p. 115). Glesne & Peshkin note that subjectivity is virtuous and something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise: “My subjectivity is the basis of the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104).

This study was deeply informed by my role as an Insider or Dine (Navajo) researcher. I am *Naakaii Dine’e*, born for the *Kinlichiiinii* clan. My clans tie me to various families in the Ramah Navajo community as well as the main Dine (Navajo) Nation. I am bilingual in Dine (Navajo) and English and literate in both. I grew up on the New Mexico side of the Dine (Navajo) Reservation, which is known as Eastern Navajo. In the 1970s my husband was a director of the Ramah Navajo High School a.k.a. the Pine Hill School and I was a teacher there. Being both Dine (Navajo), my husband and I are related to members of the Ramah Navajo Community through our clans as brother, sister, son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, grandfather, grandmother and in-law. My entrance to the community as researcher was facilitated and my understanding of the community was established when I worked in the Ramah Navajo community three decades prior.

The advantages of being a Native researcher are:

Having grown up in an American Indian culture can provide considerable insight and understanding that may take a non-tribal fieldworker years to acquire. Furthermore, the knowledge that an Indian scholar might have about his or her own culture often leads to the investigation of issues that non-Indian or non-tribal scholars might not consider. (Champagne, 1998, pp. 182-183)

I had other unique advantages having lived in the Ramah Navajo community and worked in the school during its beginning years.

For if the story is in our heads before we arrive at the field site, and it is already known by the people we study, then we enter the ethnographic dialogue with a shared schema. We can fit in the pieces and negotiate the text more readily; we begin the interaction with the structural framework already in place. (Bruner, 1986, p. 151)

I experienced vulnerabilities attached to being an insider/Native researcher. These were being reflexive and to “‘test’ their [my] own taken-for-granted views about their [my] community” (Smith, 1999, p. 139). Being away from the community for at least 20 years did provide me some measure of objectivity and my coming into the community and returning to my urban home for the study encouraged reflexivity. I increasingly had twinges of guilt about presenting data from the Dine (Navajo) perspective and interpreting it for academia by fitting or more appropriately “squeezing it” into an alien and restrictive linear research paradigm. My allegiances to Dine

(Navajo) ethics and to academe became trying. Sometimes I felt that I was gathering information that I felt would not be understood anyway from the dominant society and thus would be distorted, and at other times I felt like I was doing what dominant society researchers have done in the past to the Ramah Navajo community by taking from them and distorting their image.

Interviews

My interviews were conducted in the Ramah Navajo community. Within that geographical area is a subgroup of non-Native personnel such as teachers and medical personnel who maintained their own exclusive community. I did not rely on this community for any information since the intent of this research was to define the Dine (Navajo) perspective on self-determination. I conducted 36 one-on-one interviews and one focus group of four participants. I interviewed 36 Dine (Navajo) and four non-Dine who were recommended by the school board because they had spent 10 or more years of service in the Ramah Navajo Community. The four non-Dine participants including Michael Gross, the school lawyer, presented information about the lawsuits, and the events that were tied to school development. The participants' ages ranged from 15 to approximately 86 years and they were administrators, teachers, students, parents, and elders. The involvement of elders was essential for their mentorship role in this research. Two of the original school board members died during this research period and their contribution through their interviews was invaluable. A third elder provided the theoretical framework for this study which will be discussed later.

The Ramah Navajo people were highly aware of their identity apart from the Dine (Navajo) living in Dinétah (Navajo lands) on the main reservation. One lady illustrated this in her introduction to me:

I'm proud and glad that I belong to the Ramah Navajo Community, because we're so unique, and the Navajo Nation, they look at us as a role model. We might have been isolated from the Navajo Nation and they might not have really wanted to provide us much assistance, but a lot of the things that we've done, we've done with our uneducated people.

Another Ramah Navajo participant reflected a similar attitude:

I guess the Ramah Navajo people, in terms of government, school development and so forth, may be a little bit more advanced than the bigger Navajo Nation. They have a lot of people that can speak up and they know what they're talking about. They know where they want to get to.

Unlike participants 30 years old and younger, the older participants were aware of the community achievements brought about by their school such as jobs, electricity, water, and roads. For younger participants infrastructure improvements were taken for granted while older participants had experienced difficult times before these amenities existed. One participant remembered a quote by a prominent founding

school board member: “I remember Chavez Coho’s comments when he used to say ‘We did something that the BIA couldn’t do for 100 years, but when we got incorporated, we did it in 10 years.’” Ramah Navajo community members displayed pride in their identity and achievements.

I utilized both the Navajo and English languages where appropriate. Many participants code switched. Like other Native communities across this country, most participants under the age of 20 spoke very little Dine (Navajo) language. Community members were aware that language shift was occurring at an alarming rate and several of them estimated that only 30% of all Ramah Navajo children could speak Dine fluently.

For Dine (Navajo) participants, the interviews were speech events (Spradley, 1979) that represent Dine (Navajo) cultural social interactions. Dine (Navajo) protocol was observed by: always introducing myself through my four clans, observing the indirect method of addressing a topic, utilizing an advocate from the community for each initial visit to the elderly, giving a small gift of baskets of fruit or pollen and prepared deerskin as requested, honoring the *sacredness* of spoken words, attending chapter meetings for the full duration which sometimes lasted 4-5 hours, and meeting with participants in their own environment.

As participant observer, I attended school board meetings, chapter meetings, staff workshops, special events such as the Veteran’s Day Celebration at the Ramah Navajo Chapter House, the 30th anniversary celebration on school campus, staff awards banquet on campus, and general election day voting at the Ramah Navajo Chapter House. In all these events, Ramah Navajos were clearly the majority in attendance. I spent several days assisting and learning from the school archivist. An important aspect in participation observation was tuning into KTDB-FM, the Pine Hill School Radio Station and the Tl’ohchinii Dine Bi-radio [Ramah People’s Radio]. The station provided an update of events in the community, school announcements, commentaries about events by local people, airing of the taping of actual community events, and a report from various agencies in the community. I ate with students in the cafeteria and observed them in their student commons and library. I visited the Family and Child Education (FACE) program, the Higher Education Program, the Ramah Rug Weavers Program, the Pine Hill Cline, and the KTDB radio station. The majority of these programs were staffed with Ramah Navajo people.

Document Collection

I examined documents about the Ramah Navajo carefully so that distortions, resulting from studies that drew conclusions from a non-Indian frame of reference, would be avoided.

Data collection consisted of primary and secondary sources of information. The earliest documented interview was by Many Beads’ son. (Many Beads was the headman of the Ramah Navajo after Hwéeldi/Long Walk, 1864-1868.) This interview was recorded in 1930 and written in the Navajo language in 1954 by linguists, Young and Morgan, and is included in the *Navajo Historical Publications, Historical*

Series #14. Other sources were interviews and oral histories taken in 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000 from Ramah Navajo community members. Many of these interviews are in the *Tsá Ászi'* Magazine, a publication from the Ramah Navajo high school students. Many of the elders who were interviewed in the 1970s and 1980s are now deceased. More recent sources are by Sampson Martinez (1975), then a Ramah Navajo High School student, who wrote *The Mormons Come to Ramah* and *Katie Henio, Navajo Shepherd* (Thomson, 1995) a biography of a respected elder in the Ramah Navajo community.

Many of the early published materials on Dine (Navajos) were actually about the Ramah Navajo. For example, Clyde Kluckhohn co-authored *The Navajo* (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1946) and authored *Navajo Witchcraft* (Kluckhohn, 1944), which are about the Ramah Navajo people. The Harvard Values Study led by Clyde Kluckhohn and the Ramah Project Study occurred during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. These studies focused on various topics concerning the Ramah Navajo people such as veterans, families, religion, sexual taboos, witchcraft, school children, and ethnoherbology. Many of the studies were dissertations and others became important monographs.

Another important study, *Personality and Government*, was about three Dine (Navajo) communities, one being the Ramah Navajo Community. This study was probably the most intensive and thorough study of American Indian societies. It was conducted jointly by the Committee on Human Development of the University of Chicago and the United States Office of Indian Affairs (Thompson, 1951). Some of the noted members of the research team included Clyde Kluckhohn, Margaret Mead, Eric Erickson, Robert Havighurst, Dorothea Leighton, and others. Monographs entitled *The Navajo* (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1946) and *Children of the People* (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1947) resulted from the *Personality and Government* study. A Ramah Navajo informant for both Kluckhohn and Leighton and whose name appears in both monographs mentioned above, became one of the founders of the Ramah Navajo High School in 1970. This link between the early studies and the Ramah Navajo High School is Bertha Lorenzo. As an elder, she proactively worked and demonstrated that the conclusions the early anthropologists made about the Ramah Navajo Community were erroneous. The early anthropologists had described them as marginal, dysfunctional, and seeking an identity when in reality the Ramah Navajos were a united proactive community who struggled to survive under insurmountable odds.

Incidentally, the books and articles about Ramah Navajos provided unintended information about both the Ramah Navajo society and the non-Indian researchers. For example, *Lucky the Navajo Singer* (Leighton & Leighton, 1950) contributed valuable information about social life and important events of the Ramah Navajo Community during the 1940s. In *Lucky the Navajo Singer* (Leighton & Leighton, 1950), the authors seemed to feel that ceremonial events, which occurred often, sidetracked Lucky from becoming what they would consider to be a responsible father and husband as perceived in the Euro-Western world. Yet, to Dine (Navajo)

people, helping out at ceremonials and training to be a singer, and later becoming a singer and conducting ceremonials, was an honor and duty. Furthermore, the Dine (Navajo) society being a matrilineal society and having extended families provided needed support for each other whether the father was present or not. In presenting case histories and ethnographic studies in a culture other than their own, non-Native researchers present more about themselves and the “integrity” of their work. Native researchers have monumental tasks ahead to correct previous misinformation, to “talk back and take back our image.”

Findings on Self-Determination

Research Questions and Forced Translations

“Traditional people preserve the whole vision and scientists generally reduce the experience to its alleged constituent parts and inherent principles” (Deloria, 1991, p. 31). The two research questions were examples of “constituent parts” as understood in the Euro-western experience and these questions stipulated an exact counter experience in the Dine (Navajo) worldview which resulted in forced inexact translations. When the two research questions were answered they were given in a Dine (Navajo) context. Thus, many Dine (Navajo) terms that were given for self-determination were close approximations to the Euro-western concept of self-determination, but basically incorrect. The translations were:

terms are: *Navajo font is used here* (do for yourself),
t’11 awo[7bee án7t’9 (persevere)
biniy4 1n7t’9 (persevere with a goal in mind, plan)
1nih 1d1’ 1n7t’9 (do it for yourself)
na’ ák’ih yázhjít’i (plan and talk for yourself)
Ida nats1h1kees (think and plan for yourself)
Ish7h ba’1h7shy3ago (I will take care of matters myself)
ha’1t’77sh99 1d77177[77g77 1d77177[(whatever you plan to do or make, do or make)

In the past I utilized these terms as responses to Dine (Navajo) people’s understanding of self-determination. I later realized that these terms like most Dine (Navajo) terms in Navajo dictionaries, are forced concepts that are mere translations from the English language. As forced or superficial attempts to describe an English concept, they do not truly describe self-determination from the Dine (Navajo) world view.

English Concept of Self-Determination Is a Paradox

The concept of self-determination, as spoken in the English language and contextualized in the American society, has become a concept steeped in contradiction and paradox for the Ramah Navajo community. Non-formally educated elders of seventy and eighty years old abhorred hearing the English pronounced “self-determination” as it was discussed in the community. They felt that “self-determi-

nation” created chaos and consternation because it supported unfair competition among Dine (Navajo) chapter communities. One elder emphasized: “Self-determination causes selfishness. It creates the desire to obtain for oneself without regard for others.” Other people suggested that self-determination promoted conceit and bragging. The understanding of the westernized self-determination concept and referral to it in English is not part of the Dine (Navajo) worldview.

Self-Determination, A Dine (Navajo) Lifestyle

The Ramah Navajo presented historical accounts attesting to a united, organized community who displayed admirable bravery and solidarity since 1864. Historical accounts from non-Native researchers differed significantly from the voices of the Dine (Navajo) people. Non-Native researchers described the Ramah Navajos as a “drifting people” (Kluckhohn & Leighton, 1947, p.131), “never constituted a unified and tightly knit community” (Kluckhohn, 1966 cited in Blanchard, 1971, p.1) and “just coming into having a sense of community” (Blanchard, 1971). These disparaging commentaries contradicted the Ramah Navajo people’s stories about their history and community. They had been defamed and reframed in the Euro-western image and their story is important because:

...the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to *rewriting* and *rerighting* our position in history. (Smith, 1999, p. 28)

Self-determination, as perceived by Dine (Navajo) has always been practiced. A Ramah Navajo stated: “Self-determination has always been taught in the family, just like when we talk about having a good character. It’s like being respectful and being trustworthy, and being responsible, *Jo ei akwit’eego danihi’diniist’aa* [this is how we were taught].

Self-Determination in the Dine (Navajo) Context

The study confirmed that the Ramah Navajo have their own definition of self-determination based on the Dine (Navajo) epistemology, *Sa’ah Naagai Bik’eh Hozhoon*. Various explanations of this philosophy include a description of “gods that created the world” (Benally, H.J., 1994) while another explanation is that it is about “universal beauty, harmony, and happiness which a person becomes incorporated at the time of death” (Witherspoon, 1975, p. 53). Living life according to the values and precepts of Sa’ah Naagai Bik’eh Hozhoon requires *Hozhooji lina* (Blessing Way). “The Blessing Way is a harmonious, peaceful, and happy way of life...*Sa’ah Naagai Bik’eh Hozhoon* is what is ascribed to the Holy People and their way of life” (Benally, H.J., 1994). The Blessing Way is also known as the Beauty Way.

Living life according to *Sa’ah Naagai Bik’eh Hozhoon* is a life-long journey and

life-long learning. Self-determination is an aspect of *Hoozhooji Iina* (Bessing Way). In Dine (Navajo) life, reference to the development of self-determination is expressed in one of the Navajo Beauty Way/Blessing Way Prayers. An elder in the Ramah Navajo community referred to this as the framework within which development and construction occurs. In the Beauty Way/Blessing Way prayer, this constructive process is explicated through the building of the sacred Hogan. An elder described in English his epiphany during his participation in a Beauty Way prayer:

The songs were about the beginning of one's life, conception, mom's womb, birth, and even before conception, how our mothers and fathers planned for what this new being will be, shall be. The lyrics talked about collecting all of the most precious gems of this universe: turquoise, abalone, white shell and different other types of materials that Navajo use in their symbolism. Gathering all of these materials together and then completing the hogan, or a dwelling using these materials. And once the cover is placed on this dwelling, then the last part of a set of songs says that the holy person then enters this home and proclaims, This is a holy place; I will always come to this place. I tried to process the lyrics, the meaning and so forth. That's when I said, "we've been to universities studying and this man is singing that the Navajo philosophy is based on this developmental process." I realized then that what the elders were talking about in Ramah really had meaning to one's life. The old folks were telling us at Ramah that we need to draw from those principles, those experiences, and integrate it into an educational system.

The founding school board members of the Ramah Navajo School in 1970 wanted the principles from the Beauty Way Prayer for the "constructing of the sacred Hogan" incorporated into the developmental process of the new school. The construction of the sacred Hogan, mentioned in the Blessing Way/Beauty Way Prayer emanates from *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hoozhoon*. Construction of the sacred Hogan is an ontological and an epistemological construction in the epistemology of the Dine (Navajo) people that applies to development as individuals and as communities.

The Hogan, Nihima [Our Mother]

The hogan has great significance and was first mentioned in Dine (Navajo) Creation stories. Aronilth (1994) describes how the first hogan was made as directed by the Holy People. The hogan, mentioned in the Beauty Way Prayer, has sacred and mystical characteristics (Beck, Walter, & Francisco, 1977). It has sacred significance with teachings, songs, and prayers. The male and female hogans have their own functions. The female hogan, the place of residence, is addressed as *nihima* [our mother]. "Our forebears addressed this female hogan as a mother, because it takes care of you like a mother does" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 108). "The Navaho hogan is not just a place to sleep and eat; it truly is a home and also a temple" (Callaway & Witherspoon, et. al., 1974, p. 56).

Dine (Navajo) acknowledge the Hogan as "our mother." The Hogan is a micro prototype of Changing Woman, the most important deity for Dine (Navajo). Land is

also acknowledged as “our mother” to the Dine (Navajo). It, too, is a prototype of Changing Woman. Land, known as Mother Earth, is not a metaphor to Dine (Navajo). Mother Earth is a being who is a source of life, gives birth to all living creatures, and sustains the life of her children by providing them with food and protection. The Hogan, like land is a place of conception, birth, growth and development and death.

Asdzaan Nadleehi (Changing Woman), Nihima (Our Mother)

Dine (Navajo) through the original four clans were made from Changing Woman’s body. “The relationship of Changing Woman to her children [Dine] provides the major conceptual framework...” (Witherspoon, 1975, p.16). The point of reference for understanding Dine society is the relationship of Changing Woman to her children. As Dine (Navajo), we have an intense Mother-Child bond which specifies our relations to all in the universe, both animate and inanimate, and our behavior is guided by who we are as members of our clan throughout our lifetime.

Each Dine (Navajo) is first and foremost a member of one’s mother, and grandmother’s heritage. Dine (Navajo) belong to one’s mother’s mother’s family for generations previous and time immemorial. These clan-family connections provide assistance and various obligations so that a Dine (Navajo) always feels connected and situated. Suitable marriage partners are specified by clans. The Dine (Navajo) Nation counsel has legislation that prohibits marriage between individuals with the same clan. Dine (Navajo) will always feel related or a part of a family wherever one travels throughout Dinétah (Navajo land) or outside of Dinétah. When difficulties arise, a clan member is there to step up and assist.

Dine (Navajo) clans are classified in family groups. There are more than 100 clans in the Dine (Navajo) world. Clans, as entities, are not based on biological relationships. Clans have their individual history and stories. They are established social units analogous to the Euro-western concept of a community. These social units as communities are unlike the Euro-western which require physical proximity, however, clans function as Euro-western communities. Most outsiders/anthropologists are unaware of this and still identify extended families groups situated near one another as “outfits” or “camps” which they acknowledge as a community. Our communities are related clans extending over hundreds of miles throughout the Dine (Navajo) Nation. A Dine (Navajo) person acquires K’*e* (respect) by knowing one’s place clan-wise as well as knowing the relations and accompanying expectations. One is always a sibling, parent, grandparent, cousin in the family of Nihima (our mother), Asdzaan Nadleehi, Changing Woman. Beck, Walters, and Francisco (1975), Native women authors state: “By most traditional Navajo elders, she is seen and remembered in the change of seasons, for this is what she is...” “What happened in Changing Woman’s life, ... set examples that are seriously considered to be fundamental to Navajo identity and culture today” (p. 76). Kinaalda was performed by the Diyin Dine’*e* (Holy People) when Changing Woman had her first period. Expressed by a Navajo: “Today we believe that when a girl has her first period there is nothing wrong with that. It is

something sacred to us (p. 223). Thus, Dine (Navajo) womanhood is highly honored in the Dine (Navajo) society.

Despite unjust and cruel treatment Dine (Navajo) experienced since contact with Euro-westerners, their intense sense of relationship and caring that Changing Woman modeled continues in contemporary Dine (Navajo) society. This is evident in the ever-present Kinaalda (puberty) ceremony that is performed throughout Dinétah (Navajoland). It is most apparent in the important touching and blessing that the Kinaalda [girl undergoing the ceremony] bestows on her guests as she actually becomes Asdzaan Nadleehi, Changing Woman.

Self-Determination—What Does It Mean?

For Native American people whose point of view is wholism, the importance is not to categorize and name but to ask the question ‘what does it mean?’ (Deloria, 1991, p. 31) The research questions that were to elicit responses to define self-determination are not as important as identifying the wholistic *meaning* of self-determination. This meaning is found in the Dine (Navajo) context or worldview. Asdzaan Nadleehi, Changing Woman, provided an egalitarian space where women had an honored role in Dine (Navajo) society. The caring and compassion Asdzaan Nadleehi, Changing Woman, had for her children and modeled for her children is the context for self-determination in Dine (Navajo) society. Illustrating this point, a Ramah Navajo stated: “I think certain individual people in the community . . . how they help the people in the community, not thinking only about themselves . . . Thinking about the people first . . . a lot of commitment, being self-determined!” Thus, self-determination from the Ramah Navajo perspective is based on having compassion and caring for one’s people. Self-determination from the Dine (Navajo) perspective is neither individualistic nor based on competition, but has a communal goal.

Conclusions

Research gives power to the researcher. It permits the researcher to name. “Naming the world has been likened by Paulo Freire to claiming the world and claiming those ways of viewing the world that count as legitimate” (Smith, 1999, p. 81). Since contact with hegemonic societies, indigenous people have been coerced to translate their concepts to fit dominate Euro-western society’s reductionist approaches and thus name their experience for Western science. The definition(s) of self-determination is/are *not* as important to indigenous societies since it is a “naming and claiming” process which no individual or society has an ethical right to do as indigenous societies believe. Self-determination, thus, is important for its wholistic meaning and not as an isolated definition. For Dine (Navajo), the meaning of self-determination is found existing in an egalitarian place and space where women are honored and relationships, both to animate and inanimate, are important. This relationship is based on care and compassion. The interactions and relationships in Dine (Navajo) society are based on Hadine’e

Baa Haajinizin [having compassion for your people], Hadine'e Ayoi'oyo'nih [having love for your people], and Hadine'e hwil Niliigo [respecting your people].

The Dine (Navajo) ideal egalitarian place and space was practiced several centuries ago when this observance was made in the *Santa Fe Gazette* in 1853 of the then Dine (Navajo) society:

They [Dine (Navajo)] treat their women with great respect, and the modern doctrine of 'womens' rights,' seems to be fully carried out in practice among the tribes. The women own all the sheep, and the men dare not sell them without permission—nor do they ever make an important trade without consulting [them]. They admit women to their councils, who participate in their deliberations, and often control them... they worship the women, as their Great Spirit...." (Correl, 1976:331 cited in Toledo-Benalli, 2003, p. 30)

Colonization of the Dine (Navajo) has changed all that was egalitarian. Allen argues "The colonizers saw (and rightly) that as long as women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest of the continents were bound to fail" (Allen, 1986, p. 3). The holocaust of 1864-1868, *Hweeldi* (The Long Walk), through subjugation and genocide of Dine (Navajo), attempted to destroy all that was Dine (Navajo). *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'e Hozhoon*, the Dine (Navajo) philosophy of beauty and harmony, continues today even when only 2000 of the 9000 Dine (Navajo) that were released from their concentration camp four years later returned to rebuild their Nation.

For contemporary Dine (Navajo) as well as other American Indians, The 1975 Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act supposedly provided the opportunity for American Indian people to take control of their lives while ironically being managed by the United States government. Not only is self-determination a paradox because it is controlled by the United States government, but it is a paradox because American Indian people assent to the implementation of self-determination from the Euro-western perspective which ultimately defies their existence.

Self-determination through schooling has been and continues to be a paradox. Since the 1817 Civilization Fund the United States government provided funds to missionaries to establish schools for Indian youth in order to transform them from their "Indianness," American schooling has continued to promote and impose its own ideals which remain in conflict with Indian communities. Self-determination from the Dine (Navajo) world view remains in conflict with the goals of formal education in America. Since formal educational institutions reflect the knowledge, values, and attitudes of the society's dominant groups (Gutek, 1991, p. 25), Dine (Navajo) and indigenous people worldwide have to strive even harder to maintain their ideals and values in formal educational systems/programs. The specter of assimilationist schooling based on a patriarchal system continues to clash with egalitarian values of Dine (Navajo) society where womanhood was honored and compassion for inanimate and animate was recognized. Even as more and more American Indian community-based, community-controlled schools proliferate, these educational institutions seem to support non-indigenous values through their curriculum and

practice due to the pressures of standards based education and high stakes testing. The No Child Left Behind legislation as well as the difficult economical times has created immense pressure and challenges for indigenous schools to maintain their original goals of incorporating their language and culture.

Today, in the Dine (Navajo) Nation government and politics, the struggle to survive is evident daily when chapter governments fiercely compete with one another for funding under the semblance of *self-determination*. Utilizing the Euro-western process of “self-determination,” the ideals, values, and teachings of Dine ancestors are either deliberately ignored or forgotten. The consequence of this activity is disunity and chaos. A return to what Dine (Navajo) ancestors once deemed the characteristic of a good leader is needed in each Dine (Navajo) chapter where a good leader had the values of *Hadine’e Baa Haajinizin* [having compassion for your people], *Hadine’e Ayo’o’o’nih* [having love for your people], and *Hadine’e hwiil Niliigo* [respecting your people]. Incidentally, like other translations, these terms actually go beyond and include much more than what is stated in the English language. A return to the egalitarian place and space that Asdzaan Nidlee’hi provided for her children is needed for the survival of Dine (Navajo).

Optimism and hope lies with indigenous leaders and their commitment to encourage and defend community based schools where “Red Pedagogy” is upheld. “Red pedagogy” as defined by Grande “is historically grounded in local and tribal narratives, intellectually informed by ancestral ways of knowing, politically centered in issues of sovereignty, and morally inspired by the deep connections among the Earth, its beings, and the spirit world” (2004, p. 35). The Dine (Navajo) have contextualized this approach to fit their own philosophy of learning (Benally, 1994) through the maintenance of language and culture. The Dine (Navajo) must take the next step to insure their survival. This step is to accept and promote theoretical frameworks from Dine (Navajo) epistemologies. The decision for survival based on their understanding and implementation of self-determination from the Dine (Navajo) perspective belongs to the Dine (Navajo) themselves.

Dine (Navajo) leadership must acknowledge and honor Asdzaan Nadlee’hi’s egalitarian place and space by reorienting their attitudes about appropriate implementation of self-determination. As Alfred writes, “to argue on behalf of indigenous nationhood within the dominant Western paradigm is self-defeating” (1999, p. 58), so too, to argue on behalf of indigenous *self-determination* within the dominant Western paradigm is self-defeating. Our task as researchers and practitioners is “to detach and *dethink*” (Grande, 2004, p. 53) from the Western paradigm and reconceptualize self-determination based on our own epistemologies for the future survival of our indigenous societies.

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